

# Biological fathers not necessarily the best, social dads parent well too

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A large number of U.S. children live or will live with a "social father," a man who is married to or cohabiting with the child's mother, but is not the biological father. A new study in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* examined differences in the parenting practices of four groups of fathers according to whether they were biologically related to a child and whether they were married to the child's mother. Researchers found that married social fathers exhibited equivalent or higher quality parenting behaviors than married and cohabiting biological fathers.

Furthermore, whereas married and cohabiting biological fathers displayed relatively similar quality parenting, the parenting practices of married social fathers were of higher quality than those of cohabiting social fathers. Married social fathers were more engaged with children, took on more shared responsibility in parenting, and were more trusted by mothers to take care of children.

Led by Lawrence M. Berger, PhD, MSW, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, participants were drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a longitudinal study of children born in 20 large U.S. cities in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Sample children were mostly born to unmarried parents and had been followed from birth to approximately age five.

Analyses and regression results from interviews with mothers revealed that they perceived married social fathers to be engaged in relatively high quality parenting practices with the five-year-old children. Most

notably, social fathers exhibited significantly higher levels of cooperation in parenting than biological fathers.

"On the whole, our findings suggest that marriage is a better predictor of parenting quality with regard to social fathers than biological fathers," the authors conclude. "Our study is relevant to understanding the quality of parental care that children receive from resident fathers across a range of family configurations that are now commonly experienced by children."

Source: Wiley

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